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**From:** Shore, Berry  
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**Subject:** POFA/POFS Clips

## **Hurtful H20: Flint Representative Joins Newburgh Leaders on Water Discussion**

By Tanja Rekhi

Sunday, June 12, 2016 at 12:11 PM EDT

Time Warner News – Hudson Valley

NEWBURGH, N.Y. -- It's an issue with far too many questions, and not enough answers.

"We want to know where it came from and why so that we can prevent it from happening," congressman Sean Patrick Maloney said.

"Let's make sure the people of Newburgh have safe drinking water and we'll figure out from there what we need to do to make that sustainable," Flint, Michigan representative Dan Kilde said.

Maloney and Kildee joined Newburgh City Manager Michael Ciaravino for a tour of Washington Lake Saturday.

The city's former source of drinking water was found to have elevated levels of the possible cancer causing chemical PFOS back in May.

"The city switched over very early on to Brown Pond," Maoney said said. "The problem is Brown Pond is a finite source and is running out."

So the city is tapping into another water source for now, the Catskill Aqueduct.

"That gives us a little breathing room to get the lake cleaned up, to get the contamination stopped, and to make sure we don't have any health effects to the people," Maloney said.

The Department of Defense is investigating what caused the contamination and Maloney says they will give first priority to investigating the high levels of contaminants at nearby Stewart Air National Guard Base.

"So the most likely source of contamination the city has already shut off, but we want to make sure we are 100 percent sure where this stuff is coming from," Maloney said.

Steps going forward include cutting off the contamination source, installing a carbon filter, cleaning up Washington Lake, and treating any health impacts that PFOS may have had on residents.

All things that will cost millions of dollars, but Maloney says the state has guaranteed that money will be provided.

"That's the commitment we have from the state," Maloney said. "There will be no cost to the taxpayers of the city of Newburgh period."

"This is really about getting the people of Newburgh what they need and that's a fresh healthy source of drinking water," Kildee said.

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## **McLaughlin talks Hoosick Falls on 'NYN'**

By Matthew Hamilton

June 13, 2016 at 1:19 PM

Albany Time Union

Miss the latest episode of “New York Now,” the award-winning coproduction of WMHT and the Times Union? We’ve got you covered.

New York State Public Radio’s Karen DeWitt sits down with Republican Assemblyman Steve McLaughlin to discuss the ongoing Hoosick Falls water contamination crisis, and joins the Reporters Roundtable to discuss Gov. Andrew Cuomo’s last-minute push to step up policing of independent expenditures.

WMHT’s Jenna Flanagan looks at the issue of childcare subsidies for low-income families as part of an ongoing series on the state of the American Dream.

The full episode is below. Enjoy:

<http://blog.timesunion.com/capitol/archives/250153/icymi-mclaughlin-talks-hoosick-falls-on-nyn/>

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## **Hoosick Falls reps, constituents differ on approach to toxic water probe**

by Karen DeWitt (NYS Capitol Correspondent) Albany NY

North Country Public Radio

Jun 14, 2016 — As part of the push to end the legislative session by Thursday, state lawmakers who represent Hoosick Falls, where water has been contaminated with PFOA, want to extend the statute of limitations to bring lawsuits against polluters.

The bill would extend the current statute of limitations law to allow a three-year window between when a contaminated area is declared a Superfund site and when New Yorkers can file a lawsuit.

The Senate sponsor, Senator Kathy Marchione, who represents Hoosick Falls, said it is a top priority for her in the remaining days of the session. "There can't be a time limit on justice for Hoosick Falls families," Marchione said.

Hoosick Falls resident Michelle Baker said, at the very least, she wants the right to hold potential polluters accountable. "Our water has been contaminated for possibly decades," Baker said. PFOA, which stands for perfluorooctanoic acid, is a chemical that has been linked to cancer. She said countless residents and mothers like herself go to bed or wake up with a "tear in their eye." "We are wondering, 'Is my child going to be sick next, am I going to be sick next?'" said Baker.

In the Assembly, 132 of 150 members back the bill, but Marchione said even though the bill was written in February, she has not spoken to Senate Leader John Flanagan about the measure yet. But she said she is encouraged that the measure advanced through the Senate Judiciary Committee and plans to talk to the Senate leader in the three days left in the legislative session.

Marchione said she instead has been discussing whether the Senate should hold hearings on how the Cuomo administration handled the Hoosick Falls water crisis. There have been allegations that officials in Cuomo's health department knew of the PFOA contamination a year and a half before they warned residents.

The Cuomo administration acted early in 2016, after the federal EPA's regional administrator told villagers in late 2015 not to drink their water. But Marchione said although she has not ruled out hearings, she'd rather work cooperatively right now. "When you start pointing fingers and you start laying blame, it's harder to work with people," said Marchione. "I don't want anyone stopping the progress that has been made in Hoosick."

Marchione said it is a better idea to create a task force to decide how to handle future

cases of potential chemical contamination in drinking water. Marchione admitted, however, that all of the meetings in a task force might not be public.

Baker said she would rather have public hearings. "I do support the hearings, because then that way, residents can be present," said Baker. "We might have the opportunity to ask questions. We can hear every answer that's given." Baker said she thinks hearings could proceed without finger-pointing. But Baker said she's grateful to Marchione for trying to push the bill to expand the time to bring lawsuits against polluters.

Marchione conceded she has similar questions about who knew what when on the PFOA contamination. "And if that's real, we need to know why that occurred," Marchione said. But, she maintained hearings would not be the right way to go at this time, and praised Cuomo and his administration for acting quickly since the winter to offer residents water filters and blood tests.

The Assembly sponsor of the statute of limitations extension, John McDonald, said he'd like to hold hearings. "It's something that I think has merit to it," said McDonald. He said he asked the Assembly speaker for permission to do so. But Speaker Carl Heastie said although he has not ruled out holding hearings on the state's handling of the Hoosick Falls water crisis, he doesn't plan on holding them anytime soon.

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## **Lawmakers push for PFOA pollution bill**

By Kyle Hughes

June 13, 2016

NYSNYS News

ALBANY >> State legislators touted a bill Monday to make it easier to sue polluters, but ruled out holding hearings to determine if NYS health officials failed residents of Hoosick Falls by failing to warn them about drinking water contaminated with PFOA.

"Look we're all human beings," said State Sen. Kathy Marchione (R-Halfmoon). "When

someone's blaming you and pointing their finger at you when you are out there on site like they are in Hoosick Falls ... At this point I believe we should continue working so that people aren't drinking contaminated water."

"If you think, you know, going forward and pointing fingers – you can do both," she said. "Well, maybe you can. I'm not willing to risk that."

Pressed by reporters, she said she wasn't implying that health officials would balk at helping Hoosick Falls if questioned about possible misfeasance, but the important thing was to correct the situation first.

"I want to sit at the table with Governor Cuomo and with the commissioners and I want to be able to ask for things that are necessary," she said. "I want them to cooperate with me. I'm not saying they won't. I'm saying I want that relationship to continue. It is a very important relationship to the people in my district."

"Could we have hearings going forward? I've said from the beginning, of course we can have hearings."

State officials have come under fire for not issuing immediate warnings about the polluted water source. PFOA and another chemical called PFOS remain under study by the federal Environmental Protection Agency, which could issue federal regulations for drinking water standards. An advisory now counsels people not to drink water if the chemicals are found to present at more than 70 parts per trillion.

Michele Baker, a Hoosick Falls resident who participated in Monday's press conference, said afterward that the state had an obligation to hold hearings to determine what happened.

"Personally I'm not a supporter of a task force (to investigate what happened)," she said. "I would like to see hearings. I do support the hearings because that way residents can be present and we might have the opportunity to ask questions and we can hear every

answer that is given. So I think that's really important to the folks of Hoosick Falls and that is why I am here today."

Legislators have a bill to extend the statute of limitations for filing personal injury lawsuits for up to three years after a site is designated a Superfund toxic pollution site.

Opening up a new window for lawsuits comes in the wake of blood testing that showed many residents in and around Hoosick Falls have high levels of PFOA in their bodies. The chemical perfluorooctanoic acid was widely used in manufacturing of consumer products for decades, and only recently have environmental officials moved to issue warnings about exposure.

The drinking water wells in Hoosick Falls were found to be contaminated with PFOA after a resident had the water tested. The Department of Environmental Conservation now says the filtered water is safe to drink.

The same chemical has been found in drinking waters sources in Petersburg, Rensselaer County, and in neighboring Bennington County, Vermont. The chemical appears to be present as a result of pollution from local manufacturing plants.

Because of its common use in consumer products for decades, most Americans have trace amount of PFOA in their bloodstream. In Hoosick Falls residents who were tested the average is about 10 times higher.

The toxicity of PFOA in such settings is not entirely clear, which has caused a panic among some residents and promises of action by the state to make drinking water is filtered and safe to consume. Banks also stopped writing new mortgages on properties affected by the contamination.

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## **As Bennington Plans For PFOA Fix, It's Unclear Who Will Pay**

By Howard Weiss-Tisman • 11 hours ago, June 13, 2016

VPR, Vermont Public Radio

Two recently completed engineering reports find that it could cost \$17 million to bring clean water to the properties around North Bennington that have tested positive for PFOA.

So far, 227 wells in the area are contaminated with PFOA, which is a suspected cancer-causing chemical, and the state says it wants to extend nearby municipal water systems to the contaminated properties.

But now that the engineering studies are done, some big questions remain.

Bolles Brook spills out of the Green Mountain National Forest and its water flows into Bennington's filtration plant, which is about a mile away.

The plant is state-of-the-art, with computerized monitoring systems, and it operates at less than half of its capacity. So there's plenty of cold, clean water to supply the people in North Bennington and Bennington who have PFOA in their private wells.

Plant superintendent Terry Morse says there's a reason why the water system isn't already serving the far reaches of Bennington and North Bennington.

"One of the reasons water mains haven't been extended into these areas is because, in general, they're not overly populated areas," Morse says. "They're rural areas where most of the lots are either undeveloped or they're very large lots for single residents."

Financially, it just doesn't make sense to lay miles of pipe for a few hundred customers.

But state and local officials say this is the best way of addressing the widespread water contamination.



The Bennington water system has the capacity to serve all of the contaminated properties, but it's not yet clear who will pay for the water line extensions.

To make the extension even marginally sustainable, Morse says homes with PFOA, and even those without the chemical, will need to hook on to help cover maintenance costs.

"The bottom line is ... that if we're going to buy into this process, and we're going to buy into this project, for the long-term maintenance and upkeep of these lines, I think that we really need to more than encourage people to tie on if everyone's going to make this investment," he says.

The investment in Bennington will be almost \$14 million, and at this point it's not clear who will pay.

"If ... we're going to buy into this project, for the long-term maintenance and upkeep of these lines, I think that we really need to more than encourage people to tie on." - Terry Morse, Bennington Water System superintendent

And the Bennington system will only serve a portion of the contaminated properties. It would cost another \$3 million to \$4 million to reach the remaining properties from a second system in North Bennington.

Saint-Gobain, the company which owned the industrial site where the contamination is believed to have originated, has been paying for bottled water, water testing and carbon filter systems. But the company hasn't agreed to cover the municipal water line extensions.

The company did pay for the engineering studies, and Gov. Peter Shumlin says he'll meet with company officials to talk about the next step.

"They are not required to reimburse," Shumlin said. "That would be decided by a court of law if we came to a dispute about how we build this out. My hope is, before we all lawyer up, let's try to do what's right. And so far that's been working."

The Bennington Selectboard decides when and if the project will move forward.

Selectboard Chairman Thomas Jacobs says he's not eager to hold a bond vote, but at the same time, people are calling him about taking care of the situation.

He says the town's in a tough position.

"I don't see the town just deciding to go ahead and start construction in the fall or the spring without having some real firm groundwork done on whether we'll have a third party involved," Morse says. "But at the same time, we have these citizens that are concerned about the impact on their lifestyles and the values of their properties. They're all considerations we have to deal with, sooner rather than later."

Then there are the issues of laying pipes in wetlands and over streams, and getting all of the necessary permits and easements to make the project happen.

And the state is still testing wells, so there might be even more water lines — and costs — pinned to the project.

Engineers say construction could begin at the end of this year and, if that happens, work will likely run until the end of 2017.

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## **Hoosick Falls teacher responds to Mark Ruffalo's NY environmental action video**

by Matthew Hamilton on June 13, 2016 at 2:48 PM

Times Union

Days after actor Mark Ruffalo appeared in a video touting New York's environmental leadership, a teacher from Hoosick Falls is responding, asking the actor to stand with the community ravaged by a water contamination crisis.

The video of Ruffalo popped up on Gov. Andrew Cuomo's YouTube page on Thursday. Ruffalo touts environmental strides the state has taken under the Cuomo administration's watch, including plaudits for an increase of the state Environmental Protection Fund to \$300 million and \$200 million for drinking water infrastructure, among other funding scored in the most recent state budget.

The video also includes clips of former Vice President Al Gore from the October rollout of actions taken by the state to combat climate change.

On Monday, Hoosick Falls Central School District music teacher Rob Allen responded on the district's YouTube page, highlighting "poor leadership from elected officials" and the community's own response to the ongoing perfluorooctanoic acid contamination. The video also highlights what some residents in the small Rensselaer County village and the surrounding area have seen as a long wait for state action and criticizes information included in blood test results that show PFOA levels well above the national average in a number of cases.

"Mr. Ruffalo, we appreciate your leadership and advocacy for clean water, and your increased focus on environmental issues. I am sure that the governor may have done some great things for our state lands," Allen says. "But hearing from you about our governor's supposed great leadership and protecting the environment and our people was very hard for us in Hoosick Falls and not to mention other community in our state and elsewhere that are going through the same PFOA contamination."

Allen also asks Ruffalo for his assistance in advocating for annual blood testing and biomonitoring to track PFOA contamination, a trust fund for future medical expenses, state and federal hearings on the crisis, and increased water testing for PFOA and other chemicals statewide.

A representative for Ruffalo could not immediately be reached.

In a joint statement, the state departments of Environmental Conservation and Health defended the state's action on the contamination crisis.

"The residents of Hoosick Falls are understandably concerned about the pollution of their water and soil caused by Honeywell and Saint Gobain," the departments said. "The state has worked aggressively to make sure these companies are accelerating the clean-up process and has actively managed the installation of a new filtration system that is removing PFOA from the public water supply, as well as hundreds of individual filtration systems for homeowners with private wells. The state will continue to use its legal authority to hold both companies fully responsible for their actions and ensure that they comprehensively address the impacts from the contamination on the community."

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## **West Morgan-East Lawrence health advisory could be lifted next week**

By Keith Clines Staff Writer

June 13, 2016

DECATUR DAILY

MOULTON — Customers of the West Morgan-East Lawrence Water Authority could resume drinking water from their taps next week if tests today confirm a plan to reduce two chemicals in the system's water is successful.

Test results from mixing Decatur Utilities water with West Morgan-East Lawrence water are expected to be known June 24, Ed Poolos, chief of the Decatur branch of the Alabama Department of Environmental Management's Field Operations Division, told the Lawrence County Commission on Friday.

If the results show that the water contains less than a combined 70 parts per trillion of perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA) and perfluorooctane sulfonate (PFOS), a federal health advisory for the West Morgan-East Lawrence system will be lifted, Poolos said.

"It's a plan that we think will mitigate the problem," Poolos said.

Water samples will be taken today when the blending of Decatur Utilities water with West Morgan-East Lawrence water is complete, Poolos said.

West Morgan-East Lawrence will take the samples at five locations to send to an EPA-approved laboratory to check for PFOA and PFOS, the authority and Poolos said.

Decatur Utilities on Wednesday agreed to provide West Morgan-East Lawrence with up to 2.8 million gallons of water daily. West Morgan-East Lawrence's water demand is between 4.5 million and 5 million gallons a day, General Manager Don Sims said.

Sims announced two weeks ago that the system's customers should not cook with or drink their tap water.

Dr. Scott Harris, the state health officer for this region, said the Alabama Department of Public Health is satisfied with the plan.

"This sounds like a good plan to take care of the problem," he said.

Commissioner Mose Jones said the area has a high rate of cancer, and asked if the two chemicals cause cancer.

Harris said most of the studies conducted have been on animals and that not enough research has been done on humans to know.

“The studies might show one thing one time and another thing another time,” Harris said.

John Guarisco, the state health department’s toxicologist, said the department’s cancer unit could find no statistical difference in the occurrences of cancer in the area compared to other areas of the state.

“Except that y’all smoke a lot,” he added.

The EPA has said the chemicals may be associated with various types of cancer, with developmental problems for fetuses and breast-fed infants, and other health problems.

West Morgan-East Lawrence began draining its water from its storage tanks Wednesday to make room for water from Decatur Utilities. Fire hydrants throughout the water district were opened Wednesday to flush the water from the system.

West Morgan-East Lawrence will turn off its water production plant when its tanks are filled with Decatur Utilities water, which will allow Decatur Utilities water to be distributed throughout the system, Poolos said.

The water plant will resume production any time the system’s storage tanks reach a critically low level, a West Morgan-East Lawrence statement said.

After the blending process is complete, West Morgan-East Lawrence will take water samples at five locations today to send to an EPA-approved laboratory to check for PFOA and PFOS, the authority and Poolos said.

Customers may notice a change in their water's color, odor and taste during the blending process, Poolos said.

"Nothing's wrong with that water. It's just a normal blending procedure," he said.

Officials will take water samples throughout the distribution system, including at schools, to determine if fluoride is present to confirm that the Decatur water has been mixed throughout the system. Decatur Utilities uses fluoride in its water treatment plant, but West Morgan-East Lawrence does not, Poolos said.

Samples will be taken regularly to test for fluoride to confirm that mixing the two water sources is working, he said.

The authority also will test regularly to verify that the PFOA and PFOS levels are within EPA limits.

West Morgan-East Lawrence will continue to operate that way until a \$4 million temporary filtration system to remove the PFOA and PFOS from its water is complete, which is expected to be late September.

When the filtration system comes online and the system is producing water below the EPA advisory levels, West Morgan-East Lawrence will quit buying water from Decatur Utilities.

West Morgan-East Lawrence plans to test every two weeks after the temporary filtering system is operating to confirm to ADEM and the Alabama Department of Public Health that the water is consistently within limits for PFOA and PFOS.

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**Opinion: Hoosick Falls Residents and All New Yorkers, Deserve Water Contamination Hearings**

| by Liz Moran

June 14, 2016

Gotham Gazette

Just imagine knowing that the water you are drinking is quietly making you sick. That it gave you or someone you love kidney cancer. That it took years to get your government to listen, then when you got its attention, your concerns were downplayed.

The bond between clean water and our health has been broken as we've heard stories state- and nation-wide about contamination. And like Flint, Michigan, there is a great disconnect between the suffering of Hoosick Falls, New York residents and the actions (or in this case, inaction) of their own elected officials. Hoosick Falls residents are just 30 miles from the steps of the state Capitol in Albany, but that may as well be a million miles given the response from the people elected and hired to protect them.

State lawmakers should hold hearings on what has happened in Hoosick Falls and the flawed state reaction to the water crisis there. Governor Cuomo and his top officials should welcome hearings as a chance to show New Yorkers that they want to get to the bottom of the issue, protect constituents across the state, and that they will not make the same mistakes again. There are some who disagree, but they are wrong, and here's why:

Hoosick Falls residents deserve to know what happened, and who knew what and when. Further, lawmakers cannot ignore that what has happened in Hoosick Falls is not limited to just that village. Grossly inadequate chemical regulations on the books in New York, coupled with an increased hunger by state Senators to "cut the red tape" (which translates into cutting resources and powers for enforcement of our laws) means that it is only a matter of time before another community is fighting another unregulated chemical which has fouled their water.

Hoosick Falls is like many New York communities, particularly upstate, with an extensive manufacturing history.



For decades, industries were allowed to operate virtually unchecked as their operations endangered residents. For many years, contaminations of this kind were seen as affecting other communities home to larger companies. General Electric, for instance, spent decades dumping PCBs into the Hudson River, up until the late 1970s. Meanwhile, outside Syracuse, Onondaga Lake became known as the most polluted lake in America after a century of pollution from predecessors of the very same company associated with Hoosick Falls contamination: Honeywell.

A lack of regulations and enforcement created a false sense of security for many communities – after all, if a chemical isn't regulated, it's not tested. And if it's not tested, then how does anyone know if it's in their water and affecting their health?

In May, when the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) issued new safety levels for PFOA and PFOS, many localities suddenly found themselves with unsafe drinking water. Of course, the water had been unsafe for many years – but if no one knew to test for it no one knew there was a problem.

Since the crisis in Hoosick Falls became public, PFOA has been found in the drinking water of nearby Petersburg, a community also now home to a Superfund site. PFOS has also been found in the City of Newburgh's water; water in Suffolk County also exceeds safety levels.

Which brings us to the realities of today, and the unique role that state legislators have in holding hearings - public reckonings that help clarify what can and should be done to help people. Currently, there are more than 80,000 untested and unregulated chemicals on the market. The state Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) has introduced emergency rules regulating PFOA and PFOS, but there are still tens of thousands of chemicals unaccounted for.

Resistance to legislative hearings is a head-scratcher. We're pleased to hear that the Assembly has reopened the door to hearings; they should have occurred as originally planned following passage of the 2016-17 budget, which occurred April 1. This summer is now the time to follow through - no further delay is acceptable. These hearings should not be scuttled, the issues facing the people of Hoosick Falls and other municipalities must be seen in the light of day. It is legislators' responsibility.

Hearings are a part of governmental checks and balances. Witness how rapidly the Senate rushed to hold a hearing on how to keep communities from imposing a fee to curb costly plastic bag waste. A public health crisis certainly deserves more proactivity than we have seen. Instead, the Senate is advancing a package of bills toward a vote that would exacerbate the very problems resulting from poor oversight and enforcement. In fact, one proposal forces agencies to enact a "one-in, one-out" practice when imposing new rules. In other words, when the DEC finalizes its PFOA rule, they would have to cut a regulation for the benefit of Honeywell International and Saint-Gobain, the companies responsible for the Hoosick Falls contamination.

The action that legislators take now will have enormous consequences for years to come. They must use their expertise in local affairs toward addressing their constituent concerns and public health hazards. The goal should be to consider contamination issues from across the state to connect the dots and create a game plan that modernizes our regulations and enforces our laws. New Yorkers must have confidence in both their drinking water and their elected officials.

Residents of Hoosick Falls and many other locales would be glad to hear that their elected officials are working throughout the summer to protect our water and our health. It's an opportunity lawmakers should not pass up.

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## **In U.S. drinking water, many chemicals are regulated - but many aren't**

By Brady Dennis | The Washington Post

June 13, 2016

PITTSBORO, N.C. -- For all the pathogens and chemicals monitored by the federal government to protect drinking water, a far broader universe of "emerging contaminants" is going unregulated.

The Environmental Protection Agency keeps tabs on scores of substances that have surfaced in water systems around the country, with the aim of restricting those that endanger public health. But partly because the rules that the agency must follow are complicated and contentious, officials have failed to successfully regulate any new contaminant in two decades.

Only once since the 1990s has the EPA come close to imposing a new standard - for perchlorate, a chemical found in explosives, road flares, rocket fuel and, it turns out, the drinking water of upwards of 16 million people.

The years of inaction, critics say, have left many Americans at risk from substances that few even realize might be in their water in the first place.

"We live in a country where we've made a fundamental decision that chemicals are safe unless they're proven to be bad," said Jeffrey Griffiths, a public health professor at Tufts University School of Medicine who studies waterborne diseases. "We have this system which is biased toward the presumption of innocence."

Here in North Carolina, one of the contaminants on the government's watch list has been found in rivers and streams on which more than a million people depend.

Since 2013, Detlef Knappe and a team of researchers at N.C. State University have logged hundreds of miles as they gathered samples along the Cape Fear River basin. From Greensboro in the heart of the state to the coastal city of Wilmington, they have identified troubling levels of "1,4-dioxane," a byproduct of plastics manufacturing that can be found in everything from paint strippers and varnishes to detergents, shampoos and cosmetics. The EPA has deemed it a "likely human carcinogen," although limited data exist on the cancer risks it poses for people.

"1,4-dioxane really has no business being in the water," said Knappe, an environmental engineering professor who has worked with state regulators and the National Science Foundation to dig deeper into the issue. "This has probably been going on for decades, but no one has really looked at it. . . . We only find what we look for."

The EPA keeps a list of about 100 unregulated contaminants that have made their way into water supplies from industrial sites and other sources. Every five years, the agency updates a shorter lineup of chemicals that it thinks should be tracked and studied and requires utilities to do testing.

The current inventory includes two viruses and 28 chemicals, including 1,4-dioxane. The goal is to eventually regulate those that pose the greatest risk to public health.

But critics say that regulators should be moving far more assertively, even as scientists continue researching the short- and long-term health impacts. They blame both the system set up by Congress as well as the agency's glacial pace.

"For an agency to be unable to adopt a single new standard in 20 years is inexcusable," said Erik Olson, health and environment program director for the Natural Resources Defense Council. "It's a combination of a bad law and very bad implementation."

In the wake of the lead crisis in Flint, Mich., and other problems in communities elsewhere, many people are increasingly wary of what flows from the faucets of their homes and schools - and whether the federal government is doing enough to safeguard drinking water. In April, a Kaiser Family Foundation poll found that more than 60 percent of Americans rate the government's efforts as just fair or poor.

In 1974, the newly enacted Safe Drinking Water Act gave the EPA broad authority to monitor and regulate the nation's public drinking-water supplies. The agency adopted existing standards covering nearly two dozen microbial and inorganic chemical contaminants. When regulators took too long to expand that number, Congress made clear in 1986 that it wanted faster action.

A bipartisan majority passed additional legislation requiring the agency to establish drinking-water limits for scores of contaminants - including bacteria such as legionella and chemical compounds from acrylamide to xylene. Lawmakers also directed the agency to set up a system for monitoring still-unregulated contaminants.

The result over the next decade was health-based thresholds for more than 85 substances, including a range of disinfection byproducts and chemicals known to increase the risks of kidney damage, high blood pressure and cancer, among other conditions.

Those efforts prompted complaints from some local water officials about the increased costs and time needed to comply with the wave of new regulations. Utilities faced testing and treatment requirements for a growing list of contaminants - some that appeared only in certain parts of the country and some that scientists were still studying to determine their public health implications.

In 1996, Congress intervened again. This time lawmakers directed the EPA to do detailed cost-benefit analyses on additional contaminants that it sought to restrict. The agency also had to ensure that sufficient science existed to establish the public-health risks of a particular substance before attempting to regulate it.

"It created this Herculean set of tasks that EPA had to go through before they could adopt any new standards," Olson said.

In the 20 years since, the EPA has come close to successfully regulating only one new chemical contaminant in drinking water. In 2011, reversing a Bush administration decision, the agency announced its intention to set a federal standard for perchlorate. Exposure to the chemical can disrupt thyroid function in humans.

Yet the agency still has not put any limits in place. The National Resources Defense Council recently sued, saying that the EPA's inaction could be exposing children and pregnant women to harm.

Joel Beauvais, who heads the EPA's Office of Water, acknowledged that the agency's pace in regulating new chemicals had slowed, in part because of the system mandated by Congress. "It's a rather intensive process to get one of these drinking-water regulations across the finish line," he said.

The law demands that the agency move deliberately - and there are reasons for that, he said. A substance may occur in only a very small number of drinking-water systems, for instance, or it may not have been detected at levels of concern. Before the EPA imposes new burdens on thousands of water systems, it must prove that there is a meaningful opportunity to improve public health.

"These are very consequential regulations," he said. "They are consequential from a health perspective. They are consequential from an economic perspective."

Beauvais noted that the EPA has updated standards for certain contaminants as well as revised other rules, such as those for treating wastewater, in ways that help contain the number of overall contaminants in drinking water. Officials also have said that they are exploring new approaches and could begin regulating entire groups of substances rather than targeting one at a time.

The agency has issued numerous health advisories - most recently for perfluorooctane sulfonate (PFOS) and perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA), a potentially toxic compound that has turned up in many water systems - that can prompt state and local officials to take action or at least notify residents about contaminants. Ultimately, though, the advisories are unenforceable.

The American Water Works Association says that the EPA should winnow its list to focus on a handful of chemicals that pose the biggest public-health concerns.

"In a resource-constrained world, it's hard to make progress spreading your resources broadly," said Steve Via, the association's director of federal relations. "The way the current process is running, with large numbers of contaminants on the list you don't get enough focus to achieve progress. When you don't achieve progress, folks ask if the process is working."

Congress on Tuesday passed a sweeping revision of the 1976 Toxic Substances Control Act, which covers thousands of chemicals in products as diverse as sippy cups, paint thinners and permanent-press clothing. The overhaul will give the EPA the power to require health and safety data for untested chemicals and to prevent substances from reaching the market - and, ultimately, drinking-water sources - if they have not been determined to be safe. Implementation will take years, however.

"Prevention is an incredibly important issue for the country over time," Beauvais said. "If

we regulate more on the front end, we're less likely to have contamination from chemicals with adverse health effects on the back end."

In North Carolina, environmental officials published a report earlier this year detailing a year's worth of sampling for 1,4-dioxane within the Cape Fear River basin. It highlighted numerous "hot spots" for the contaminant located immediately downstream of wastewater facilities, suggesting that manufacturers or other industrial operators were sending it into municipal sewers. Current water treatments don't effectively remove the chemical.

"People are understandably concerned," said Steve Drew, Greensboro's director of water resources. "[But] in the absence of enforceable limits, what is a water system to do?"

His department and other downstream communities responded by launching a sort of detective operation. They tested hundreds of miles of sewer lines and met with business owners to track down the possible sources of 1,4-dioxane.

"We got it down to about a half dozen or so businesses - a couple that had very high levels of 1,4-dioxane discharged into our system," Drew said. "These companies are not even thinking about it because they aren't regulated on it."

He said the companies have been "very diligent" in trying to alter supply chains and remove the chemical voluntarily from their manufacturing process. There are early signs that those efforts are slowly beginning to lower 1,4-dioxane levels in the river basin.

But if companies balk, Drew has no way to force them to cooperate.

"Right now," he said, "it's completely dependent on good relationships, and 'please' and 'thank you.'"